

**Kunda Dixit**

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# This is war

Nepal's first wave of the coronavirus last year now looks like a ripple, and what the country is now witnessing is the main eruption.

A lot of the attention is on Kathmandu Valley because more than half the daily new Covid-19 cases are here. But it is the Tarai districts bordering India that have been ravaged first, just like last year, but on a much vaster scale.

Epidemiologists say what happens in India arrives in Nepal four weeks later, and the border cities precede Kathmandu by two weeks. Banke district is the gateway to Nepal for most returnees from India, and it is the second most affected after Kathmandu, with 4,811 active cases.

Banke's positivity rate is shocking: 210 of

by local governments. Positive patients are kept in isolation in Nepalganj, or taken to their domiciles with support of the Red Cross. These pre-established networks from the first wave have made the work smoother, but the sheer numbers have overwhelmed local capacity.

Bheri Hospital had 140 beds and NMC had 50, which had been expanded to 220 and 300 during the first wave. As our report this week (*page 6*) shows, Nepalganj has also added isolation centres, including oxygen supply, to reduce the pressure on the hospitals. But even with all this, it is not enough.

"We are operating beyond capacity," says Prakash Bahadur Thapa, the physician who heads Bheri Hospital, sounding fatigued on the phone. "Of the 277 patients now, 180 need oxygen and 9 are on ventilator support, 77 in ICU beds. We are using up to 400 oxygen cylinders daily, before Covid we needed only 10-20 per day."

More than 100 staff at Bheri Hospital have tested positive. More support has been added, but even doctors and nurses with mild symptoms are caring for patients in Covid-19 wards. A bed is available only when a patient recovers or dies. Says Thapa, "There is no comparison between the first and the second wave, and the next two months will be difficult."

The number of deaths is also higher now, and even the Nepal Army is overwhelmed with management of bodies. We asked Thapa what is most urgently needed. His reply: more hospitals than the present two declared Covid-19 facilities.

Nepalganj shows that local governments are best placed to react urgently to the ground situation. But Deputy

Mayor Thapa Magar says the scale of this crisis means that they need more medical supplies, oxygen, cylinders, isolation centres. Voluntary organisations can also help by mobilising awareness about using masks and avoiding crowds. The only way to stay alive in the pandemic is not to fall sick in the first place.

Physician Thapa at Bheri Hospital puts it bluntly: "In the coming days, it will be the availability of oxygen that will determine how many live, and how many die."

An exasperated Sunil Singh, chair of Ward 2 told us Nepalganj must declare a health emergency. "Imagine if this was an earthquake or a flood disaster, what would our response be? More medical supplies, more health staff, temporary health centres, food rations for the needy. Kathmandu and Karnali Province have not done enough. This is war. We are hanging by a thread."

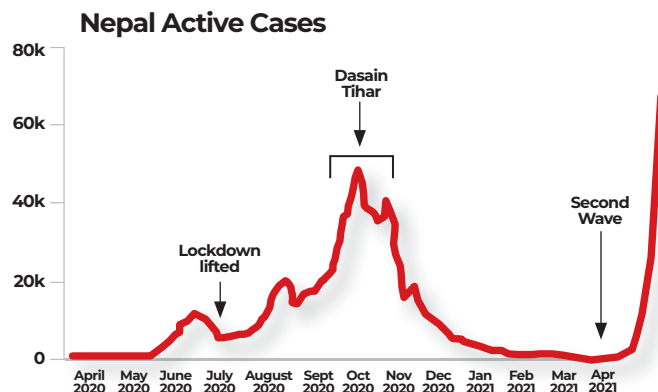
While the bill was being debated, the main opposition Unified Marxist-Leninists (UML), which had earlier worked on the draft, got cold feet and pulled out because it was afraid that its rival Marxist-Leninists (ML) and other fringe left groups would gain political mileage by stoking nationalist and anti-tarai sentiments. But since the Nepali Congress had a majority in parliament, the bill sailed through the house. The NC also thought it did a clever thing by sending the draft to the King as a Finance Bill, thus bypassing the need to have approval of the Upper House.

The King, mindful of the fact that this was a political hot potato, in turn passed the bill on to the Supreme Court. And last week, the Supreme Court declared the Citizenship Bill unconstitutional.

The fear of being swamped by a billion Indians living to the south of our open border is so palpable, that politicians of every persuasion have tried to use the citizenship issue to their advantage.

The main objection of critics of the bill seems to be that it grants people citizenship even if their daddies do not have citizenship. This can easily be reworked without hurting the chances of genuine Nepalis to finally get their papers, but that would demand political will and vision-both in short supply among our elected officials.

From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)



the 299 PCR tests at Nepalganj Medical College (NMC) in Kohalpur in 24 hours on Tuesday were positive -- 19 times higher than the rate a month earlier. The doubling time for the infection at Bheri Hospital in Nepalganj is only eight days.

Last year, when we caught up with Deputy Mayor Uma Thapa Magar of Nepalganj, she was enforcing mandatory quarantine on returnees from India. Mixed directives or inadequate resources from the federal government meant municipalities like Nepalganj had to fend for themselves.

"We were learning as we went along, this time we are dealing with a completely different virus. Last year the patient numbers were manageable, this time a high share of those who test positive need hospital beds with oxygen. If we cannot provide oxygen, we lose them. There is enough oxygen, but not enough cylinders."

The first wave was a dress rehearsal for the second one. Local leaders have learnt that the Indian border is the chokepoint, and 70% of cases initially were among those with travel history. At the border, health personnel are working in three shifts to screen inbound Nepalis with antigen tests.

Those testing negative are kept in holding centres, then transported to home districts

**"There is no comparison between the first and the second wave, the next two months will be difficult."**

**Prakash Bahadur Thapa, Bheri Hospital**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

### Second-class Citizens

*It is a sign of a failed state when the long-debated Citizenship Bill remains unresolved over two decades after it was first mooted. Nepal suffered a decade-long ruinous war, the royal massacre, major earthquakes, the Indian Blockade and now the pandemic in this time.*

*Only last year, in a move to revise the Bill, the ruling Nepal Communist Party bungled the task. And Nepal remains one of a few countries where citizenship laws are so discriminatory. Xenophobic politicians have long used nationalism to justify unequal citizenship for Nepali women.*

*This is an excerpt from a Nepali Times editorial 20 years ago this week in issue #41 4-10 May 2001 where we warned leaders against politicising the citizenship issue for easy pickings:*

Eclipsed by the Maoist crisis in this country, and buried by headline-grabbing news of the unseemly power struggle going on at Singha Darbar, is a crisis that could potentially make both look like a picnic. It is the Citizenship Bill, and the plight of some three million madhesi Nepalis of the tarai. Last year, a law that finally sought to resolve the issue and define who is Nepali was tabled in parliament.



**Nepali Times**

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Publisher and Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Audience Engagement: Sahina Shrestha, Associate Editor: Sonia Awale, Layout: Kiran Maharjan  
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editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com  
Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518



## ONLINE PACKAGES



Join us on a trip to Langtang to get up close of the Hunglung Microhydro Project, the first scheme to lower the water level of a glacial lake formed because of global warming, and at the same time generate electricity to a tourism-dependent valley. Subscribe to our YouTube channel for exclusive videos. Story: *page 6*.



British ambassador to Nepal Nicola Pollitt arrived in Nepal 15 months ago, and much of her time here has been overshadowed by the pandemic. Watch the latest episode of Nepali Times Studio where she speaks about dealing simultaneously with Covid-19 and the climate crisis, women leaders, and the COVAX vaccine initiative. Interview: *page 4-5*.



As global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, at least one-third of Himalayan glaciers are set to melt during this century. This will increase the danger of glacial lake outburst floods. Nepal must reduce the level of the most dangerous lakes and work on a cross-border early warning system. Watch video, and read report on *page 8-9*.

### HRIDAYESH TRIPATHI

The Health Minister was correct to say in his Nepali Times interview that the Covid emergency is also a product of communities and politics ignoring the surge ("Our health system can't contain the pandemic", #1059). What is this fatal obsession with wedding ceremonies, parties, festivals and sporting events these days?

**Kashish Das Shrestha**

Respected Minister, why was the vaccination drive stopped? I understand the need for a lockdown right now, but shouldn't this time be used inoculate as many people as possible? I understand we still have the Chinese jab in stock. If vaccination is leading to crowding, we should be increasing the number of centres instead of stopping it altogether.

**Adarsha Raj Pandey**

It's a difficult time to make grand judgments about capabilities but I am glad Hridayesh Tripathi is the Health Minister. He is transparent and is making an effort to communicate the scale of the crisis rather than hide behind adulterated facts. I empathise with him for the enormous responsibility that has befallen on him. I for one will try my best to not worsen the situation. Leadership matters.

**Reshu Aryal**

Where is our preparedness? Where is our Crisis Management centre and what it has been doing so far?

**Ujjwal Bhattarai**

### THE SECOND WAVE

I am so heartbroken, sending a lot of strength and hopes amidst these darkest times ("Mom in Delhi, Dad in Kathmandu", Alisha Sijapati, #1059).

**Eliza Sthapit**

Powerful article. I hope writing about this terrible time eases your burden a little.

**Marty Logan**

Daily 30+ fatalities for smaller, least developed countries like Nepal signal the siren for complete vigilance and safety precautions, especially as we deal with vaccine shortage ("Kathmandu electric crematorium running non-stop", Amit Machamasi, nepalitimes.com). Nepali people have always exhibited their resilience in the wake of calamities.

**Ngawang Tenzin**

I was stranded in Kathmandu for 6 months the last time ("Lockdown 3.0", nepalitimes.com). It was a very traumatic experience, but luckily the Nepali people took care of me. Love your country, people and the culture!

**Casper Walt**

Thank you Nepali Times for covering the unheard voices of medical students ("Medical students deprived of Covid-19 vaccines", Sahina Shrestha, nepalitimes.com). And with talks of roping in medical students to fight the new wave of Covid-19, this needs to be addressed properly.

**Aakash Neupane**

**Nepali Times.com**

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### Mom in Delhi, Dad in Kathmandu

by Alisha Sijapati  
As the subcontinent buckles under the second wave and countries shut down once again, a Nepali Times reporter has found herself caught up in a story she is covering with the family stranded between India and Nepal. A personal account only at nepalitimes.com

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**



### "Our health system can't contain the pandemic"

Health Minister Hridayesh Tripathi blames middlemen for the delay in vaccine procurement and public and administrative negligence alike for the second wave. Read full interview on our website.

**Most popular on Twitter**

**Most visited online page**



### Mt Everest City

by Monika Deupala  
Despite the deadlier second wave, the tent city of climbers and guides has made a comeback at Everest Base Camp with backlogged expeditions from last few years. Go online to read about new creature comforts at EBC.

**Most commented**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Kathmandu electric crematorium running non-stop. More than 30 fatalities nationwide for a second day in a row as Nepal is hit by second wave. Photos by Amit Machamasi.

**HArjyal** @HArjyal  
Had been hearing about never built crematorium at Pachali since early 60s. Will they ever think about adding more in other locations? Surprised to read both working at the time of reporting.

**Sujan Dhakal** @SujanDhakal90  
The government is busy in political rift and vote banking while the country is in deep crisis. Last year Oli was busy dancing on Chinese tunes and now when second wave hits the country, he is busy saving his chair.

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
In Delhi, her mother and sister showed Covid symptoms. In Kathmandu, her father tested positive and had to be hospitalised. This is a personal account of @AlishaSijapati, a reporter who is caught in a story she is covering.

**Navita Srikant** @NavitaSrikant  
Kudos #CoronaWarrior, Correspondent Alisha Sijapati with @NepaliTimes, you have set the bar high! Despite all odds, family Covid affected, you reached out to #Nepalis in Delhi with open heart for any assistance. Super best wishes for courageous you and family!

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
Nepal lifts title amid Covid-19 surge. Spectators showed up in droves despite the second wave to watch the Tri-Nation T20 Final. Photos by Amit Machamasi.

**Cece** @cecepwt  
@kpsharmali's turmeric and guava leaves isn't going to save us this time. With packed flights and a porous border, B.1.617 and B.1.618 must already have had a grand welcome in Nepal, band baja included (all thanks to weddings and jatras we absolutely cannot miss).



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# The double burden

through programs specifically designed to support gender but by integrating its elements on all our projects. For example, we had a road-building Rural Access Program in Jumla where 50% of the workers were women and 90% of them told us it was their first experience of paid employment.

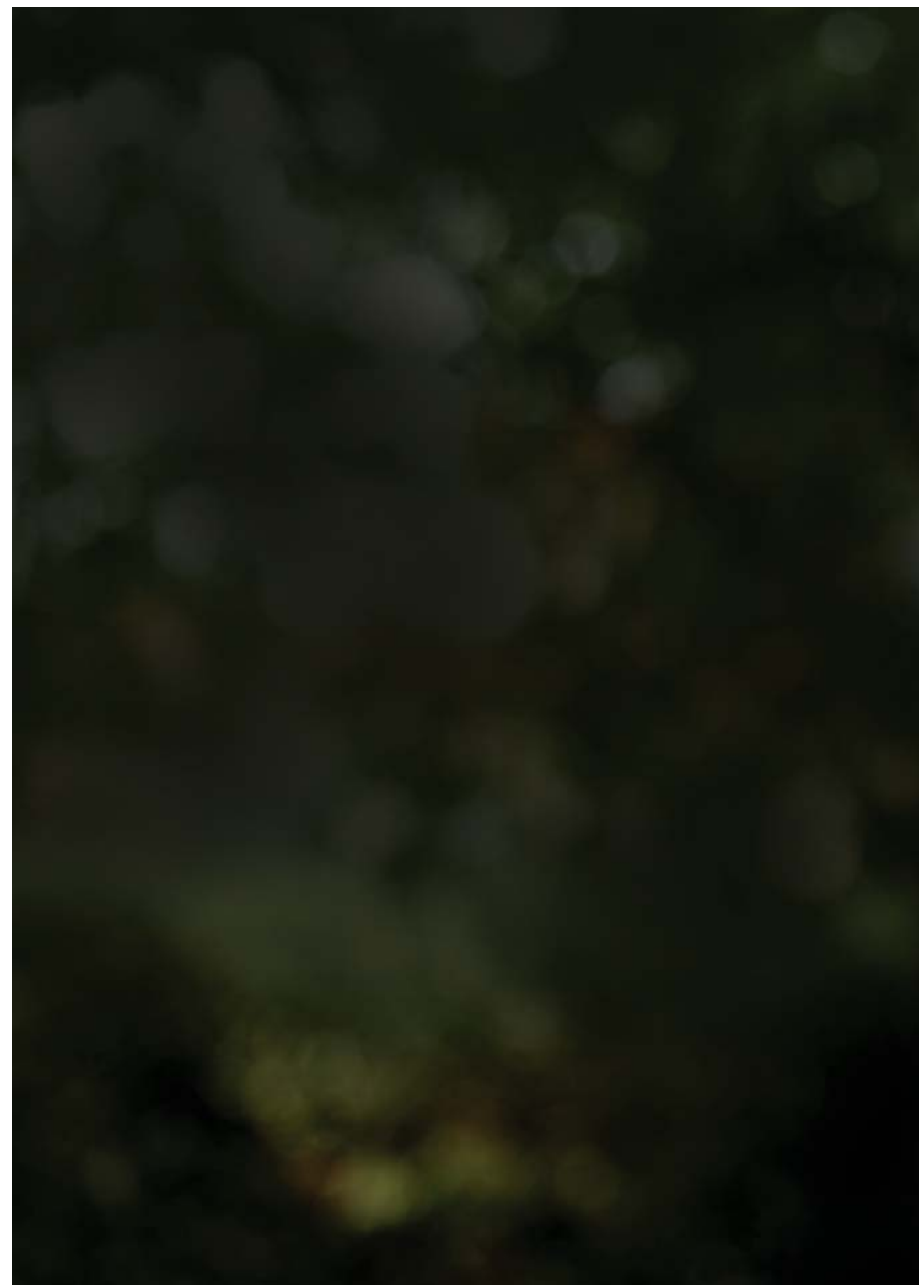
The UK is also supporting women in different sectors to break gender stereotypes, such as our work in earthquake reconstruction where we trained female masons and through our Skills for Employment Program, in industry and manufacturing, where we are beginning to see women take leadership roles, paving the way for many more to follow. We are also supporting women's access to finance to fund small businesses.

We also do a lot of work on girls' education, in particular that of marginalised communities who otherwise might not have such access.

Another area of focus is violence against women. We have seen the instance of domestic violence increase through the Covid pandemic as people have been locked down. We have been raising awareness among the police who have to investigate cases and hospitals where victims come for treatment. Similarly, we are monitoring data through surveys about people's perceptions on what is acceptable and what is not and initiating conversations around the topic.

## Do you think the coronavirus crisis has distracted governments worldwide as they prepare for the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow in November?

Climate is the top priority for the British government and it has the capacity and the political will. But as we have seen, the pandemic hits countries in waves and at different times. I think it is important that we all play our part to keep the climate crisis on the top of the agenda while also recognising



that the governments are having to manage a major public health challenge.

## The COP26 President Alok Sharma was in Nepal earlier this year. What main messages did he take back?

He was struck by Nepal's

vulnerability to climate, particularly that of the mountains. In Jomsom, he spoke with locals who talked about the lack of snow and water and having to migrate. This made a big impact on him and since then he has vocalised it on newspapers and global platforms. One of the things that the UK wanted

British ambassador to Nepal Nicola Pollitt arrived in Nepal 15 months ago, and much of her time here has been overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic. She spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about dealing simultaneously with Covid-19 and the climate crisis, girls' education and women leaders, and the UK's commitment to the COVAX vaccine initiative. Excerpts:

## Nepali Times: How has your journey as a diplomat been, and the challenge you had to face to reach this point?

**Nicola Pollitt:** I have been in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office for 18 years, but when I started I hadn't envisioned being an ambassador. However, it seemed like an interesting career and one, which had an international outlook.

I took up the jobs that came my way and over time they lead me to be here in Nepal as the ambassador, which is a huge privilege. And despite the challenges of coronavirus, which has dominated most of my time here so far, it's been fascinating and I'm hoping to have many more interesting chances to explore the country over the next year or two.

## What are the elements that contribute to women's empowerment, and ensure that we have strong women leaders?

Education is the foundation of women's empowerment, if girls don't have a good education, they are never going to have the confidence or opportunities to make

their own decisions and choices as their male counterparts might have. But building on that is a range of other things such as women's employment and breaking gender stereotypes.

## We have seen that countries led by women have done better in dealing with the coronavirus crisis. New Zealand and Finland come to mind. What is it that women bring to governance that makes them more effective leaders?

Women bring a different perspective and one that has been built on their own experience, in many cases, they have had to overcome challenges that perhaps others don't face. That is not to say that women leaders are better, but the way they interact with other leaders and their teams can sometimes offer different ways through problems. And I think that balance, that range of perspective is really important.

## How is the UK working on gender equity with development partners in Nepal?

We spend 90% of our funds on gender equality in Nepal, not



## 2021 census postponed

The Nepal government Monday decided to postpone the 12th National Population and Household Census scheduled for 8-22 June this year as the country confronts a coronavirus surge. In its 110-year history, Nepal's census has been conducted out-of-schedule once in the 1950s due to the fall of the Rana regime.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) had been on its final training of 8,000 census supervisors across the country. The only step left was to select 39,000 enumerators and train them in late May.



Tirtha Raj Chaulagain of CBS had been optimistic about conducting the census on time, adding that provided all training sessions were completed, the census could be conducted as planned with proper distancing and safety protocols.

But Chaulagain told us on Monday: "We are looking at the daily rates and projections and there is no point in taking unnecessary risks right now."

**Shristi Karki**

## Flight ban

The Cabinet has grounded all domestic flights from midnight of 3 May, and international flights from 5 May. The ban will continue till 14 May, even though



two flights a week will be allowed between Kathmandu and Delhi. Those passengers will have to mandatorily spend 10 days in hotel quarantine on arrival.

The decision has come under intense criticism on Nepal's cybersphere, with many ridiculing the rationale for continuing flights to the world's biggest coronavirus hotspot while stopping flights to other countries.

Government officials said that although airline travel was deemed safer because of the safeguards in place, passengers needed to get to the airport and many were using public transport and exposing themselves to infections.

## First female CEO

United Insurance Company announced Upasana Poudel as its new Chief Executive Officer, making her Nepal's first female CEO of an insurance company. An MBA graduate from Delhi University with over 10 years of experience, Paudel is also the youngest person to hold the senior position in the country's insurance sector.

## 2nd wave nixes recovery

Just over a year of living with the pandemic, Nepalis were just starting to get back on their feet, their income and nutrition status was improving, when another lockdown was



announced this week to contain the second wave.

According to the latest round of the nationwide poll by Sharecast Initiative and UNICEF, the loss of jobs and livelihoods was down from 61% in July and 55% in May 2020 to 19% in January. However, 40% of Nepali households are at risk of falling back into poverty with earnings less than Rs10,000 per month.

The latest survey in December also found out that 97% of the children were going to school with 89% of them taking classes online. Only 5% were being homeschooled. Bagmati and Gandaki provinces had most schools offering distance learning facilities.

Even as more parents gain confidence to send their children back to physical classrooms, up to 61% from as low as 38% back in October, remote learning will continue to be the norm as schools close again following the latest surge.

## JICA support for Pokhara

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Nepal government signed an agreement this week on a Masterplan Study for the Waste Water Management in Pokhara. Despite being the second largest city and tourist hub the city lacks the proper sewage system, resulting in ground water contamination. Phewa and other lakes are important wetland areas, and need to be protected from



pollution. Japan is currently implementing a project to improve water supply in Pokhara with a treatment plant, reservoirs as well as rehabilitation of water supply network.

## TATA for health

Tata Motors Nepal has announced a 'Safety Car for Safety Warriors' scheme, under which health workers battling the Covid-19 crisis in the frontlines are eligible



bonuses and loyalty bonuses of Rs30,000 on the purchase of its New Forever range automobiles.

## City Express 0-fee

City Express Money Transfer Australia has announced that in lieu of the Covid-19 pandemic it will not be charging any fees for its money transfers to Nepal. All transfers will be made within 30 minutes to any bank in Nepal, the group has said. Customers can download the City Express app, or go to its website [www.cityexpressmoneytransfer.com.au](http://www.cityexpressmoneytransfer.com.au)



# of climate and Covid



MONIKA DEUPALA

was to communicate Nepal's vulnerability to the climate crisis as we head towards COP26 and his visit helped do that.

**Would you say that women are disproportionately more affected by the climate crisis in the Himalaya?**

There is good evidence that women are more affected by climate change. Over 60% of women in Nepal work in agriculture, which is vulnerable to weather conditions. Women in rural areas also gather firewood or collect water but as water sources dry up, they are forced to walk much further.

But the reverse is also true. If we support Nepal to move towards clean energy, women won't need to gather firewood or suffer through indoor pollution due to cooking. Electricity and the Internet at homes open up opportunities for employment and education. Climate change is affecting them, but we can do more to support Nepal through green recovery into green growth with positive impacts also for women.

**How can women more actively participate addressing the impacts of climate change?**

Women are less confident and less willing to voice their concerns, and through our climate programs we are supporting them so that they are heard. All of this comes back to women's empowerment, giving them a platform and opportunities to lead in the climate space.

**The UK has been supporting the COVAX initiative. When do you expect the rest of the doses to arrive in Nepal?**

Unfortunately, I don't know when the next batch of vaccines under the COVAX initiative is arriving in Nepal. But I do know that there is a lot of work going on to ease the pressure on the supply because the problem is not the funding but the supply of vaccines globally. And there are conversations, which we are a leading part of in the WHO in Geneva, about how to open up manufacturing process in other countries and share the existing knowledge in vaccine development to expand manufacturing capacities so that countries like Nepal that haven't received as many vaccines as they need will soon be able to get them.



CLIMATE AND COVID

British ambassador to Nepal Nicola Pollitt arrived in Nepal 15 months ago, and much of her time here has been overshadowed by the pandemic. Watch the latest episode of *Nepali Times Studio* where she speaks about dealing simultaneously with Covid-19 and the climate crisis, women leaders, and the COVAX vaccine initiative.



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# Microcosms of a pandemic

In the absence of government, municipalities and communities on the frontlines manage the second wave

● **Sonia Awale**

Every day, many Nepalis across the country religiously tune in to the Health Ministry's website, Facebook or Twitter at 4PM. It is the same grim statistics every day: another day, another record that should not be broken.

On Wednesday, Nepal registered 8,659 new cases and 58 fatalities. The number of active cases is now 66,352 – a hundred-fold increase from mid-March. Half of everyone who gets a PCR test is Covid-19 positive.

These numbers may seem low compared to neighbouring countries like India, but in proportion to the population, it is one of the highest in the world: 211 per 1 million population. In India the figure is 278, but in both countries the tally is said to be a gross underestimate. The virus is also replicating faster in Nepal than in India, and most other parts of the world.

"Nepal saw 127% increase in infections this week, the pace of the

procured 128,000 vials of remdesivir, and 4,000 more are on the way. However, the antiviral medication that many desperate families try to get for sick relatives, has not been proven to save lives even though it reduces hospital stay of patients.

With over half of new cases concentrated in Kathmandu Valley (Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur recorded a combined total of 3,835 cases in the past 24 hours), hospital beds and oxygen cylinders are in such short supply in the capital. But the situation in provincial and district hospitals is even more dire.

The Tarai districts bordering India have been ravaged by the virus, as Nepalis returning from India brought the disease back. But by now it has moved up to the mountains as well, and is spreading in rural communities with rudimentary medical services.

In Banke district, the positivity rate is as high as 70% and one-third of them require hospital admission, doctors and nurses with Covid-19

With the federal government waving a white flag, local municipalities and wards are setting up their own isolation wards. Nepal Engineering College and the local government in Changu Narayan of Kathmandu Valley has set up a 100-bed isolation centre, neighbourhoods in Patan have added small wards with oxygen for patients who cannot find a hospital. Butwal has established an oxygen bank and independent activists have set up free services for those in need.

Collectively, local initiatives are stepping in to fill the gap left by the government. But public health experts say the only way out of the pandemic is mass vaccination and personal precautions.

They say the lockdown period should not be allowed to go waste again, and the government must step up tracing and testing, expedite vaccine procurement and launch a massive public awareness drive. 🇳🇵



AMIT MACHAMASI

Appeal from The Covid Alliance of Nepal

## Vaccines are the only solution

The US has pledged 60 million doses of its AstraZeneca stockpile with 20 countries, Nepal is not on the list

The second wave of Covid-19 is breaking across Nepal with devastating effect. Fueled by new and deadly variants, the virus is replicating faster here than in India (when adjusted for population) and arguably anywhere else on the planet. Our health systems are already overwhelmed and the economy is fracturing. We have reached the point of no return.

At current mortality rates, we need to be prepared for up to 285,000 deaths across the country.

We are deeply grateful for the \$8.5 million recently pledged by the US Government to support Covid relief efforts in Nepal. These funds are allocated to crucial activities like increasing testing capacity, treatment, infection control, and community level assistance. While extremely valuable, these activities alone will not slow, nor will they stop, the spread of the virus.

Like the wildfires that have burned with unprecedented intensity across the country, Covid is spreading at a rate that is hard to fully comprehend. In a number of major population centers, 75% of all Covid tests are coming back positive, as are 47% of tests nationwide. We anticipate that within two months, ten critically ill patients will be vying for every single available ICU bed. Access to ventilators and medical oxygen face the same constriction in supply.

Nepal also depends upon manufacturing in India for the majority of our medical supplies -- including basic items like PPE and oxygen cylinders. As India is neck-deep in its own disaster, these materials will cease to be available for import into Nepal soon. Like during the earthquake, our challenges were compounded by a devastating blockade.

This needs to be said directly: it is now impossible to upgrade Nepal's healthcare infrastructure at the speed and scale necessary to meet the overwhelming demands posed by the Covid crisis. The only option to save lives is to stop the virus at the source, to extinguish the fire. The only way to do this is through a robust and immediate vaccination campaign.

In March, the US Government pledged 4.5 million doses to support vaccination programs in Mexico and Canada. In the last week of April, it pledged to share up to 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine stockpile. Twenty countries are currently being considered as potential recipients – the list does not include Nepal.

We cannot let Nepal disappear into the darkness: there is simply too much at stake. We have written an open letter to the US Ambassador Randy Berry urging him and his colleagues to pursue any means possible to secure an immediate supply of vaccines for Nepal.

The bright and free days of winter are already a distant memory as we enter the second week of lockdown. Inevitably, these extreme measures will again slow the spread of the virus and save countless lives. But we also all know this is not a permanent solution.

Research shows that, on average, each month of lockdown costs the country approximately 1% of GDP, and this rate grows exponentially over time. Our tolerance for the lockdown will only last so long, and inevitably, despite the exorbitant price tag, this measure of last resort has a very short shelf life.

We cannot squander this opportunity again. Nepal has a well-proven ability to distribute crucial public health benefits, including vaccines, to people in every corner of the country, no matter how remote. Our Vitamin A and measles vaccination programs serve as examples for the world.

The current lockdown gives us a short window to inoculate the population against the inevitable third and fourth waves of the virus. After this, we will yet again cross the threshold into crisis and death.

Almost immediately after the dust settled following the deadly 7.8 magnitude earthquake on 25 April, 2015 the international community sprung into action to support Nepal. The US government alone has provided \$130 million for life-saving relief and reconstruction projects since.

Unlike the earthquake, this current disaster is entirely preventable. With help from our longstanding development partners like the US government, we have the opportunity to save tens if not hundreds of thousands of lives across Nepal. Providing surplus vaccine doses to Nepal is an opportunity to reduce unnecessary suffering and death.

Unlike with natural disasters, how Nepal manages the coronavirus has profound implications across South Asia and the globe. Stopping the virus here is crucial for the health of our families, the region, and the world. 🇳🇵

*The Covid Alliance for Nepal*

*To view the open letter to Ambassador Berry, follow this link: [Vaccines4Nepal.com](https://www.facebook.com/Vaccines4Nepal.com)*

*To get involved, follow @covidalliancefornepal on Facebook and @alliance4nep on Twitter and Instagram.*



AMIT MACHAMASI

spread of Covid-19 here is much higher than most of the countries in the world," said Archana Shrestha of Kathmandu University during the Ministry of Health's daily briefing on 5 May.

All seven provinces had more than a 100% rise in infections with Gandaki reporting a whopping 384% increase. Similarly, test positivity was highest in Karnali at 67.9%, much higher than in Bagmati where it was 25.9% on Wednesday.

The second wave with new and deadly variants breaking across Nepal has devastated the country. Oxygen cylinders are in short supply, doctors are overwhelmed with patients and families are running from hospital to hospital to find beds for the sick. The death toll has soared to 3,475.

Kathmandu's only electric crematorium at Pashupati in Kathmandu, designated for Covid-19 patients could not handle the increasing number of fatalities even while running round the clock. Officials had to arrange pyres for coronavirus dead on the banks of the Bagmati.

Nationwide, 4,764 Covid-19 patients are in hospitals, 600 of them are seriously ill, requiring ICU treatment and 156 more are on ventilator support. Unlike last year, most of them are in the 25-39 age group.

The Health Ministry has

are forced to care for patients undergoing treatment for the same disease.

Physician Prakash Bahadur Thapa at Bheri Hospital told Nepali Times on Tuesday: "In the coming days, it will be the availability of oxygen that will determine how many live and how many die."

With no help coming from Kathmandu, the Covid-19 hotspot of Nepalganj has converted its district training centre into an isolation ward and treatment hub with 50 oxygen-equipped beds. The idea is to take the pressure off the district's two designated Covid hospitals: Bheri and Nepal Medical College in Kohalpur which are treating patients from all over Karnali and Far-western Province.

Nepalganj spent Rs2 million of the city's own budget to set it up and staff it with doctors and nurses who work in three shifts. Patients are provided free food and ambulance service.

In Biratnagar, the head of Kosi Hospital Chumanlal Das and his staff are working day and night. "Test positivity rate is extremely high," he said during the Ministry of Health's briefing in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

Over 50 districts in Nepal are now under some form of lockdown. With hospitals at full capacity, the government has advised citizens that they have to protect themselves.

## Covid Helpers



**For isolation centres:**  
America Nepal Medical  
Foundation: <http://anmf.org/>



**For information on Covid symptoms:**  
Covid Alliance for Nepal: 9880035000  
(8am to 8pm)



**For Ambulance**  
24-hour free Covid ambulance service:  
9851277342, 985123942, 9851312417

Free ambulance service from KMC: 1180



**For oxygen**  
Hamro Team Nepal: 9851102652  
9851102653; 9851102654, 9841669170,  
9851054280, 9741710493  
Anil Rijal 9847297745  
Shisir GC 9857025765



**For bed with oxygen:**  
Youth for Nation: 9861116456, 9857030887,  
9841309599, 9863322793



**For Bed:**  
Siyana Karki 9841730903  
Dr Utsav Timilsina 9847023345



**For ICU:**  
Arjun Chand 9851206644  
Dr Amrit Bhusal 9841375180



**For food:**  
Juju Kaji: <https://www.facebook.com/kajijuju>



**Covid-19 hotline service:** 113 (8am to 8pm), 1115 (6am to 10pm), 9851255839, 9851255837

*The list has been compiled based on the information available on social media.*

*Updated covid directory: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/453859702218765/permalink/573621080242626/>*



# How Nepal can survive 2nd Covid wave

Masking up, physical separation and mass immunisation



AMIT MACHAMASI

Only a month ago, even prominent doctors in India were declaring that the country had defeated the novel coronavirus.

They felt that herd immunity in cities like Delhi would protect people from infection and death. Based on a few dubious



**DHANVANTARI**  
Buddha Basnyat

studies, they conceded that a large proportion of Indians had acquired herd immunity through mild or asymptomatic Covid-19 infections.

Just like the theory that a lifetime exposure to germs would protect South Asians, herd immunity also turned out not to be true.

Here in Nepal we are seeing a surge that is proportionately similar to India. The exponential rise in the number of cases, infection of younger cohorts, and the severity of the disease, bear all the hallmarks of the contagion sweeping across India.

While we try to treat the sick by increasing hospital space and ensuring oxygen supply, we must also plan for an exit strategy that entails acquiring more effective herd immunity through mass vaccination, and partial lockdowns enforced with all precautionary measures.

Over-preparation rather than under-preparedness needs to be our mantra. Widespread vaccination is the key to get us out of this pandemic, and we have lost precious time with the delays.

This means our vaccine diplomacy has to go into top gear. If Covishield from India is not available, we must lobby for as many dosages of vaccines from China, Russia, or the United States, and administer them urgently.

All of these vaccines are in general at least 50% effective (the 'pass mark' for vaccine efficacy). None of the inoculations appear to have serious adverse effects, even though there are questions

about whether they provide enough protection from the new strains, and duration of immunity.

We are trying to immunise the population from SARS-CoV-2, which happens to be a wily killer that exploits the human need for social interaction and mobility. Analysing this sudden and rapid spread of the virus in the Subcontinent, it looks like South Asians are more vulnerable because of our co-morbidities.

South Asians are known to be genetically more susceptible to diabetes and cardio-vascular diseases. The diet and lifestyle of people in the 40-70 age group increases the risk factor for obesity, diabetes and hypertension. Not unsurprisingly, the death toll due to Covid-19 is higher in this age cohort among South Asians than in Europe or the Americas.

The other reason for the infection suddenly taking off again in our part of the world is that we let our guard down, attending festivals, religious ceremonies and political rallies.

And then there is the presence in Nepal of both the UK variant of the virus (B.1.1.7) and the B.1.617 (Indian variant) both of which are at least 20% more transmissible. The good news (at least so far) is that these variants may not be any more lethal than the standard virus. But even if they are not, we desperately need to stop transmission.

And since this is a respiratory virus, the most effective way to do that is still to wear a mask, avoid crowds and use hand sanitiser.

In a pandemic of this scale, the general public also needs to know what treatment works and what does not. Oxygen, if available, is definitely helpful since it is a drop in oxygen level in the blood that leads to serious complications.

A drug called dexamethasone saves lives, it is easily available and cheap. Tocilizumab, unavailable in Nepal, and expensive, can also be used to treat severely ill patients and should only be administered by a physician. There are web links with pragmatic tips that may come in handy if a hospital bed is not available, as we are now seeing in India and Nepal.

There is a lot of fake news about the effectivity of treatment drugs.

The following commonly used drugs for well-known illnesses do not work against Covid-19 although, even today, many are rampantly and unnecessarily prescribed in South Asia: Azithromycin, ivermectin, chloroquine, colchicine, convalescent plasma, vitamin D, zinc, lopinavir-ritonavir, favipiravir, and doxycycline.

Even remdesivir, the drug that many desperate families try to acquire for their hospitalised relatives, does not save lives even though it is known to reduce hospital stay.

Many of these drugs were studied for their efficacy by carrying out large randomised controlled trials by the biggest, adaptive Covid-19 tests undertaken by Oxford University's Recovery Trial.

The Nepal Health Research Council was the first country set-up outside the UK that recently started collaboration with Recovery Trial as part of a global effort in order to help find a treatment drug against Covid-19.

This tragedy has exposed the inadequacy and inequity in the health care system of Nepal and South Asia. The dominant method of health care delivery in the region, especially for curative services, are private enterprises that follow the corporate health care model patterned after the United States.

Nepal has also increasingly gravitated towards this system of health care, with many new private hospitals all over the country. The pandemic will force us to question this model, and ask if alternatives like the UK National Health Service would be more suitable.

Despite the vested interests behind the medical-industrial complex in Nepal, we need to plan for universal health care (UHC), and even consider universal basic income (UBI), if we are going to improve health care to the vast majority of Nepali people.

Even President Joe Biden is trying to reform US health care with a stimulus package that has clear aspects of UBI. We need to look at a combination of UHC and UBI in Nepal because even if we survive this pandemic, there is certain to be another one sooner or later.

The international media has only taken notice of the second

wave in Nepal after reports of infections at Mt Everest Base Camp last week. But it is reassuring to know that even up there at 5,364m, Nepali specialists are doing their best to follow protocols to deal with suspected Covid-19 among climbers and support staff.

This work is critical because the ubiquitous 'Khumbu cough'

and even the life-threatening high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) simulate the symptoms of Covid-19, and it can be difficult to tell them apart. 🇳🇵

*Researcher at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences and an expert in high altitude medicine. He is also a frequent health columnist for Nepali Times.*

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# DANGER: Nepal’s glacial la

Among all the other disasters we have to be prepared for are glacial lake outburst floods

It is now looking doubtful if countries around the world can cut their greenhouse gas emissions as agreed in Paris six years ago, so that global temperature rise will be limited to 1.5 Celsius by 2050. The earth is going to heat up by more than that.

Even if it is 1.5 Celsius, the average temperature in the Himalaya will go up by 1.8 degrees because of a phenomenon called ‘altitude effect’. The best-case scenario is that one-third of all remaining Himalayan glaciers will have melted during this century. However, if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at the present rate, two-thirds of Himalayan ice will be gone by 2100.

All this will have a catastrophic effect on water supply for 1 billion people downstream on rivers that originate in the Himalaya, as well as throw off kilter weather systems. It will also increase the danger of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) within Nepal.

Till the 1960s, the Imja Glacier near Mt Everest had only a few melt-pools. Since then, the ice has been replaced by a lake nearly 2km long, 600m wide and up to 150m deep. The ice is receding 70m a year.

As glacial lakes expand, there is a danger of them bursting due to water pressure, or because of earthquakes and avalanches falling into them. As the average temperature in the mountains rise by 0.056 Celsius every year, the threat of glacial lake outbursts will only grow.

On top of the perennial risk of earthquakes, new hydropower stations, highways along rivers, bridges and towns will also have to take into account the threat of GLOFs. The flash flood near Nanda Devi in India’s Uttarakhand state in March washed away two hydroelectric plants that were under construction.

There is a warning there for Nepal, which is building cascade projects on the two Bhote Kosi rivers that flow down from China, Tama Kosi, Marsyandi, and the Arun.

In the Gandaki Basin is the particularly



A frozen Imja Lake looking east from the outlet.

dangerous Thulagi glacial lake below Himalchuli, which would directly threaten three major hydroelectric projects along the Marsyangdi River. Scientists monitoring Thulagi have found the glacier has receded by 2km since 1984, the ice replaced by a lake.

“If Thulagi were to burst, the flood would go down 100km downstream on the Marsyangdi and Narayani, taking out hydroelectric projects, highways and towns along the way,” says Pradeep Mool, a glacial scientist formerly with ICIMOD.

A survey last year showed that GLOF risk is highest in eastern Nepal. There are 42 dangerous lakes on the Kosi basin alone, like Imja, Tso Rolpa, Lower Barun and Hongu. The bursting of any one of these would send a wall of water and debris downstream to the Kosi.

There is also the danger of transboundary

GLOFs. In the past, even the bursting of relatively small glacial lakes in Tibet have caused major damage in Nepal. The earliest recorded one was in 1934, when a flash flood from a glacial lake burst in Tibet caused destruction along the Bhote Kosi.

In 1981, another glacial lake burst in China caused a flood on the same river in Nepal, damaging the Sun Kosi power plant and washing out a 25km section of the

## Nepal’s first hydropower from a g

Turning global warming into opportunity, melting Himalayan glacier is harnessed for e

● Kunda Dixit in Langtang

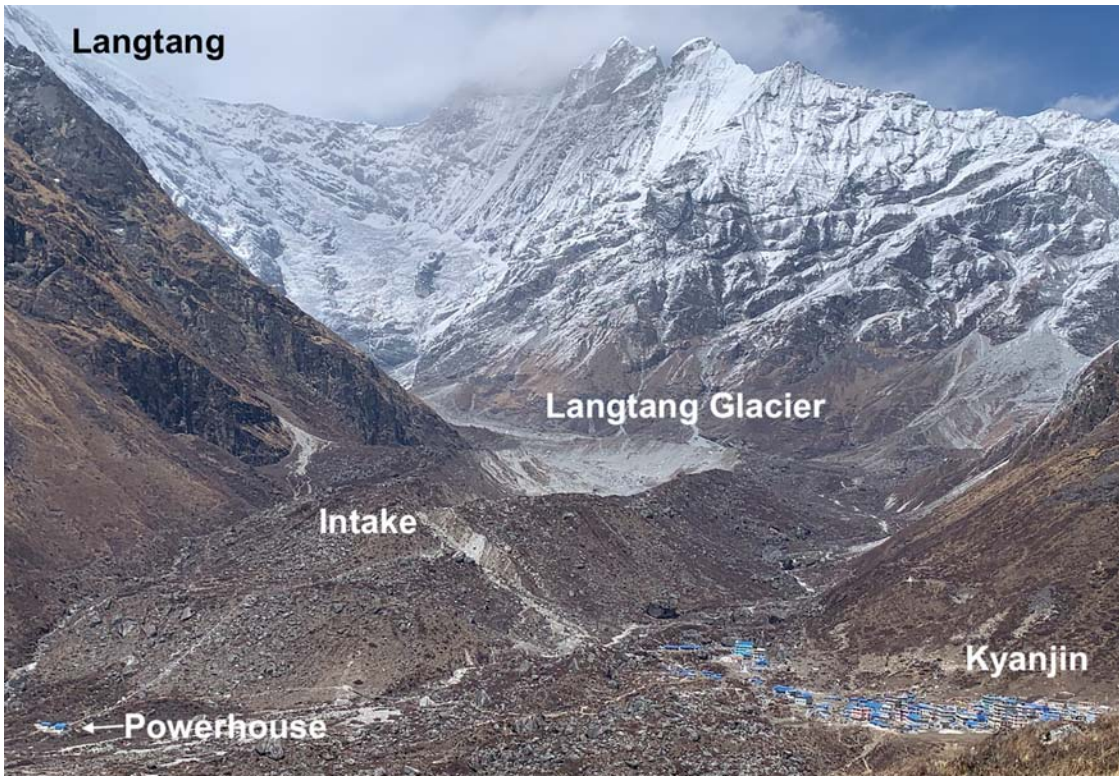
From the edge of the terminal moraine of the Langtang Lirung Glacier, there is a 360 degree view of icy peaks, and below is the monastery town of Kyanjin blanketed in overnight snow.

Towering above is Langtang Lirung with snow being blown off its 7,227m summit, with the jagged peaks of Kimshun standing like bodyguards with Tserko Ri, Yala Peak and Gang Chhenpo. And to the south is the rampart of the Naya Kanga ridge.

“When I was a boy we brought the yaks up here to graze, and they could cross the ice from one side of the glacier to the other,” says Gyalbu Tamang. “This lake was formed only in the last 20 years.”

As climate change thaws the mountains, right across the eastern Himalaya in Nepal, Bhutan and southern Tibet, hundreds of new lakes have formed at the snouts of glaciers. Some have found outlets and emptied themselves, while others, like this one, swelled up dangerously.

In the past 40 years, there have been 24 glacial lake outburst floods on Nepal’s rivers, and with newer and bigger lakes forming, they pose a serious risk to new roads,



settlements and hydropower plants downstream.

However, glacial lakes do not just need to be a threat, as has been shown by a unique project on the Langtang Lirung Glacier. This glacial lake at 4,100m is being drained to lower its level, and the

water is used to generate electricity. The Hungung Microhydro Electricity Project was built three years after the 2015 earthquake-avalanche that devastated the valley, with help from the Hong Kong-based Kadoorie Charitable Foundation. The \$534,000 scheme

has a weir and spillway at the moraine, and the water is taken through a fibre glass-insulated penstock pipe to a powerhouse that generates 100kW of power providing 24 hours of electricity to 120 households and tourist lodges in Kyanjin and Langtang.

The project is a first-of-its-kind in Nepal, and holds promise for other remote Himalayan valleys where the risk posed by expanding glacial lakes can be mitigated, while at the same time providing electricity to tourism-dependent villages.





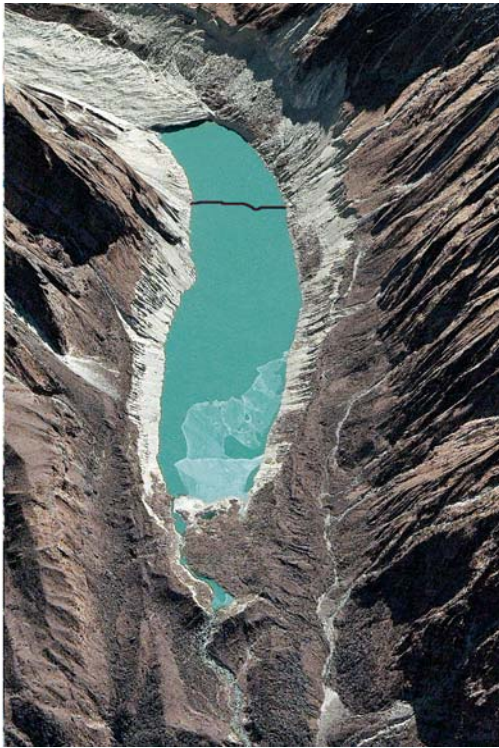
# Lakes are filling up



SHARAD PRADHAN



Repeat photography of Thulagi Lake in Central Nepal 20 years apart.



GOOGLE



SHARAD PRADHAN

Dig Tso in Khumbu that overflowed when an avalanche fell on it in 1977. The flood killed 12 people downstream.

Arniko Highway, cutting Nepal's only road to China for three years.

Of the 47 very dangerous lakes that threaten Nepal's valleys, 25 originate in glaciers in Tibet. Since 1977, there have been at least 20 GLOFs of which 14 were caused by glacial lakes in Nepal bursting, and the rest were in China.

To understand what a GLOF looks like, we have the Seti flood of 2012 which

killed nearly 70 people north of Pokhara. Although not caused by a glacial lake burst, it demonstrated the destructive power of such a flood.

Although Nepalis may not be responsible for global heating, it does not mean we can sit back and do nothing. While scientists try to figure out exactly how fast the glaciers are melting, Nepal's policy-makers need to start planning to be prepared for floods that are bound to be unleashed.

The danger of GLOFs are compounded by Nepal also being on a seismically active zone. Many of these fragile Himalayan glacial lakes could burst simultaneously during a large earthquake.

This calls for hazard mapping, early warning systems through SMS or radio, as well as mitigation efforts like those carried out to reduce water levels on Imja and Tso Rolpa. The microhydro scheme on the Langtang Lirung Glacier that reduces the water level on a recently-formed glacial lake, and also generates

electricity could be a model for other remote valleys in Nepal (see story below).

Because glacial lakes are located at such high altitudes in remote roadless areas, lowering their water level can be expensive. Most of the equipment has to be flown in by helicopter, and work is often hampered by altitude and weather. The question is: who should pay for these risk-reduction measures?

"Even if the water level is reduced they can burst and come down like tsunamis, we have to keep monitoring the lakes, and install effective early warning systems in Tso Rolpa and Imja to at least save lives if we cannot save the infrastructure," says Sarju Baidya of the Department of

Hydrology and Meteorology.

There are no feasible methods to prevent a glacial lake from bursting, and it is not in our power to stop the lakes expanding. So the only thing Nepal can do is to reduce the level of the most dangerous lakes, design downstream infrastructure taking the dangers into account, and to have an early warning system.

Says Pradeep Mool: "What we can do immediately is to install measurement stations and monitor them by satellite, prioritise the high-risk lakes for site inspections to gauge the strength of the moraines, and make a short list of the most dangerous ones for early warning, and mitigation measures." 🇳🇵

## glacial lake

or electricity



ALL PHOTOS: KUNDA DIXIT



The only downside would be that most glacial lakes are in very high elevations where there are few settlements, and also the high cost of transporting the equipment by helicopter. But if the risk-reduction from glacial lake outburst floods is factored in, these multi-purpose projects would be cost-effective.

There are other dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal like Imja in the Everest region and Tso Rolpa in Rolwaling Valley, where the water level has been lowered at enormous cost, but the schemes have not added the hydropower component. Imja was financed by the UNDP with funding from the Global Environment Facility, while Tso Rolpa was funded by the



Dutch government.

Glacial lakes have been used to generate power in the Peruvian Andes, and in the Swiss Alps existing reservoirs filled with glacial melt have been generating 4% more electricity because of accelerated melting. The Swiss are even mapping future hydropower plants on glaciers for a time when all the ice will be gone. In Bhutan, a pilot scheme on a glacial lake at 4,200m is trying to lower the water level using siphons, and plans to also see if it is feasible to generate electricity.

Experts say that with a little more investment, the moraine dams on glacial lakes can be strengthened for a fraction of a cost of building

a new artificial dam for electricity generation. For this, Langtang's Hungung Microhydro Project presents a working model.

"In previous decades it used to be expensive to build power plants on glacial lakes because they were so remote, but now that roads have reached many valleys, they are more feasible," says glaciologist Pradeep Mool.

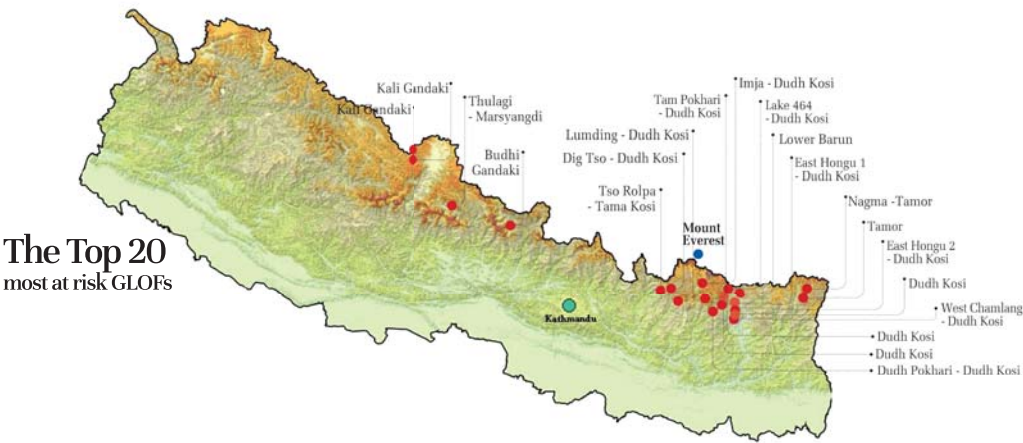
Gyalbu Tamang lost his parents and many relatives in the catastrophic earthquake-avalanche in 2015 that killed as many as 300 people in Langtang. But for him and other trekking lodge owners who used to depend on solar panels, the 24-hour electricity has transformed the

quality of life.

He says: "We can charge our phones, use appliances, the children can read at night, it is like living in a city." 🇳🇵



Join us on a trip to Langtang to get up close of the Hungung Microhydro Project which is the first scheme to lower the water level of a glacial lake formed because of global warming, and at the same time generate electricity to a tourism-dependent valley.



The Top 20 most at risk GLOFs



(left to right) A view of the project from across the Langtang Valley showing the receding Langtang Lirung Glacier, and the location of the intake, penstock and powerhouse. There is a drop of 300m, and the turbines generate 100kW of electricity.

The glacial lake is located at 4,100m, and a weir and spillway has been built to channel water to the powerhouse.

The penstock pipe is insulated with fibre-glass to prevent the water incised from freezing.

The Hungung Microhydro Project cost \$530,000 and was built after the 2015 earthquake by the Hong Kong-based Kadoorie Foundation.



## ONLINE EVENTS

### Sunday Sessions

Sunday Sessions, a fortnightly talk series with journalist Prateebha Tuladhar, is back for its second season. In the first episode, editor, columnist and author of All Roads Lead North: Nepal's Turn to China Amish Mulmi will be talking about the writing process, travel writing, history, and society. Registration details on Quixote's Cove Facebook page.  
9 May, 2pm-3pm

### Writing Wednesday

Keep an eye out for KathaSatha to put up a prompt for #WritingWednesday, designed for 5 minutes of specific but low-stakes writing. KathaSatha will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KathaSatha's Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story to KathaSatha's DMs or at kathasatha@gmail.com.



### 4th NIFF

The 4th Nepal International Film Festival will bring to the audience 65 films from 31 countries, as well as online panels and talk programs with filmmakers. Watch online for free on NETTV.  
Until 10 May

### Yoga classes

Sooriya Wellness and Yoga centre has made yoga classes available to everyone for self-practice at home. Classes are available on prior appointment as well as on a drop-in basis. Go to the Sooriya Wellness Facebook page for fee details.  
6:30am and 6pm, 9818481972

### CAP Conference

The virtual Communicating Astronomy with the Public (CAP) Conference will bring together people who will communicate astronomy to the public from around the world in one space. The conference will be held from 24-27 May. Register at <http://ow.ly/7VN550ECKjl>

## HOME DINING



### Aloo Chop

Easy to make for beginners and old hands alike, aloo chop is a great comfort food. Just have a whole lot of potatoes and easily available household spices and vegetables at hand. Also make a simple achaar to go with it, but if that's too much effort, ketchup can never go wrong. Find tutorials on Nepali food channel Yummy Food World on YouTube.

## ISOLATION READING

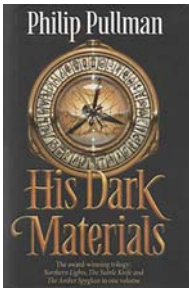


### Gulabi Umer

Madan Puraskar winner Amar Neupane's Gulabi Umer is an exploration of a young girl's psyche as she grows from a child into an adult.

### Far Out

In this history of the evolution of Nepal's tourist industry, Mark Liechty traces Western fantasies that captured the imagination of tourists after World War II, asking how the idea of Nepal shaped the everyday cross-cultural interactions that it made possible.

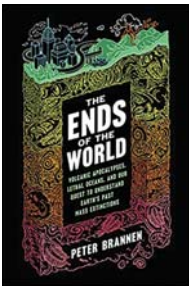


### His Dark Materials

Phillip Pullman's much-loved, award-winning fantasy trilogy, including Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife, and The Amber Spyglass, follows two children, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, as they travel through parallel worlds.

### The Handmaid's Tale

Margret Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel that was adapted into an award-winning television series is about a woman named Offred and a group of handmaids in New England who are forced to give birth to children for the ruling class.



### The Ends of the World

The Ends of the World: Volcanic Apocalypses, Lethal Oceans, and Our Quest to Understand Earth's Past Mass Extinctions, by Peter Brannen is an account of the Earth's five big mass extinction events and what they mean for the planet's future

## PODCASTS



### Forest 404

Forest 404 is a nine-part environmental thriller podcast set 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Each episode is followed by an expert discussing the theme of the episode. Find on Apple podcasts, Spotify, and Google podcasts.

### Ridiculous History

History is beautiful, brutal and, often, ridiculous. Episodes of Ridiculous History dive into some of the weirdest stories from across the span of human civilisation. Find on Stitcher.

### King Falls AM

A bimonthly podcast, King Falls AM centres on a lonely little mountain town's late-night AM talk radio show and its paranormal, peculiar happenings and inhabitants. Find on Stitcher and Apple podcasts.



### Bookclub

A group of readers talk to acclaimed authors about their best-known novels in this podcast from BBC Radio 4. Find Bookclub on Stitcher.

### Aji's Podcast

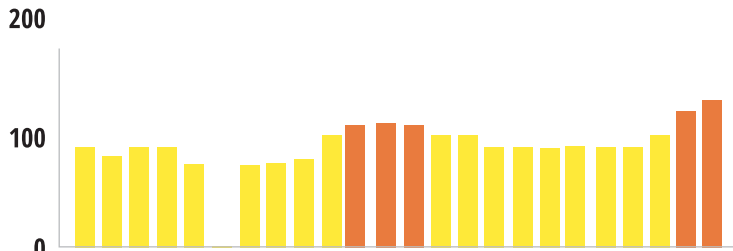
Listen to inspiring and extraordinary life stories from Nepal's elderly community. Find Aji's Podcasts on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, or Stitcher.



This is the pattern we will now see repeated through May till the beginning of the monsoon season next month: afternoon buildup with showers and storms, mainly in the mountains and foothills. In Kathmandu Valley, brief passing showers with thunder is indicated later on Friday. If anything, these storms will flare up even more over the weekend. Temperature will stay on the cooler side, a few degrees below normal.



## AIR QUALITY INDEX



The lockdown is in its second week, and predictably, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Kathmandu's city centre has improved considerably. The rains have also helped bring down the daily average at the Us Embassy's Phora Darbar monitoring station to mostly the yellow 'moderate' zone. But stay home, go to your rooftop or balcony, meditate, enjoy the fresh, clean air.

## OUR PICK



Pixar's 2017 animated fantasy film *Coco* by directors Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina follows aspiring 12-year-old musician Miguel as he is accidentally transported to the Land of the Dead on the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead. Miguel must now return to his beloved great-grandmother Coco and his family with the help of his deceased great-great-grandfather, also a musician. Stars Anthony Gonzales, Gael García Bernal, Benjamin Bratt, Alanna Ubach, Ana Ofelia Murguía and more.



### Thukpa

Nothing pairs better than thukpa and rain. Enjoy a steaming bowl made with fresh vegetables and flavourful meat. Find recipes online.

### Lassi

Missing the lassi from Indra Chowk this summer? Round up yoghurt and dry fruits, whip up kurauni, and make some at home. Classic lassi can never go wrong, but add banana to make it more interesting.

### Gundruk ko achaar

Nepali households are guaranteed to have some gundruk at hand. Added to that, have some mustard oil, chillies, lemon and household spices within reach and make some zingy gundruk ko achaar to have with lunch or dinner. Break out the old family recipe.



### Sel roti

Set some time aside during the day and make sel roti to enjoy during the afternoons. Pair it with aloo ko achar and have it with tea. Leftovers can be great for breakfast as well. Find instructions on YouTube.

# Kholo 2.0

A CYCLE OF LIFE

We are sorry to notify that the upcoming exhibitions of KHOLO 2.0 will be postponed temporarily due to the health and safety concerns regarding the Coronavirus.

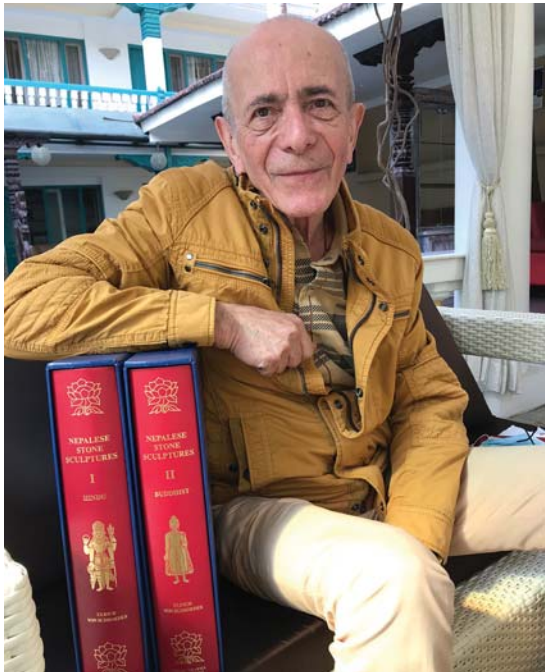
We apologize for any inconvenience but everyone's safety is more important.

FOR MORE INFO  
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# YOU HAVE HIGH STANDARDS. SO DO WE!

Drink responsibly





LISA CHOEGYAL

Ulrich von Schroeder at the Museum of Nepali Art in Kathmandu in April 2021 for the launch of his two-volume *Nepalese Stone Sculptures*.



Ulrich von Schroeder at age 22 in Kwa Baha, Patan in 1965.



Image of Uma-Maheshwar from *Nepalese Stone Sculptures*

# Cataloguing Nepal’s idols to stop theft

Swiss scholar’s voluminous documentation will make it difficult to sell Nepal’s stolen stone sculptures

● Sonia Awale

Ulrich von Schroeder first came to Nepal as a student of architecture in the summer of 1965 aged 22, backpacking overland from Switzerland. While other young westerners hung around Freak Street in those days, he would rent a bike and pedal around the Valley, systematically taking pictures of stone sculptures.

Von Schroeder’s lifelong labour of love has now been published in two bulky volumes titled *Nepalese Stone Sculptures* that is an encyclopaedia with nearly 3,000 illustrations, and 15,000 digital photographs of stone sculptures on an SD card embedded into the inside back cover.

“This is unrestricted love for Nepal, my gift to the country,” says von Schroeder at the Museum of Nepali Art, which invited him to Kathmandu this month for the launch of the books. “The market for Nepali stone figures is dead with this documentation. Auction houses won’t buy them anymore, and museums won’t display them.”

The monumental work is divided into Hindu and Buddhist volumes that contain the result of 55 years of research and over 50 trips to Nepal. The books costs \$750, and limited numbers are available at Vajra Books.

Of the 2,960 illustrations of stone sculptures in the books, half of them have been stolen and are now in museums and private collections outside Nepal. Of these, 1,150 have never before been catalogued, including those of the Mohan Chok Hiti of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace, the Kumari Pati of the Royal Palace at Bhaktapur

and the inner courtyard of Pashupatinath temple.

Von Schroeder is the global authority on Buddhist art and culture studies and has six other volumes on Tibetan, Sri Lankan and Indian iconography but it is the Nepal edition he is most emotionally attached to and calls it his “meditation”.

The book is dedicated to Nepali historian the late Sukra Sagar Shrestha, whom von Schroeder regarded as his mentor.

“Documentation is important because it will render stolen objects unsalable, eventually leading to their return home, so it doesn’t matter where they are at the moment,” says the scholar. “But I’m not for restitution, Nepal is not ready to bring them back and value and protect them.”

This is in direct contrast to the growing activism for the repatriation of stolen figures from museums and galleries around the world. The homecoming of Patan’s Laxmi Narayan from the Dallas Museum of Art last month has raised hopes for the return of thousands of other religious objects.

The documentation of 15,000 Nepali stone images by von Schroeder, however, is a milestone for researchers and institutions to identify stolen objects, where they were originally from, and to help in their restoration.

“His lack of support for repatriation doesn’t justify his own work but with his book, we are in the position to go beyond and further in terms of restitution, we now have a comprehensive record of stolen images from the 1960s onward, previously we had to rely on incomplete information,” says Roshan Mishra, director of

Taragaon Museum and curator of the Global Nepali Museum, an online database of Nepali objects housed in the museums around the world.

The good news is that there is now a trend of voluntary return of stolen images from the western collectors, galleries and museums as the wave of decolonisation takes root. This means that sooner rather than later, Nepal will be getting back many of its religious objects. Unfortunately, the government and local communities are not prepared for restitution.

“Everything need not come back at once. But at the very least we must get these museums and collectors to hold it in trust for

us until such time we are ready to bring them back,” says activist Kanak Mani Dixit.

Currently, most of the repatriated religious objects are housed at the National Museum in Chhauni, poorly-lit and in dusty and dismal condition, much to the dismay of heritage activists—another reason why von Schroeder does not mind if the stolen objects do not return to Nepal right away.

There is also an ongoing discussion about the fate of objects with damage or cracks, as was the case with Laxmi Narayan. One of its hands was broken during transportation across the world.

According to local belief, deities that are damaged cannot be kept as

the central idol in the temple even though they are worshipped. In a country that is prone to disasters ranging from fires to earthquakes, risk assessment of buildings where returned artefacts are housed is also of utmost importance.

Municipalities can also assist the central government in local housing and proactive restoration, say experts like Roshan Mishra

He adds: “The end goal is to restore the objects to their original place but until we can do so with security, we should decentralise them to museums closest to their actual location for the public viewing while also strengthening the community’s sense of ownership.” 🇳🇵

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ROSHAN SAPKOTA/RSS

**POLITIK:** Narayan Kaji Shrestha of the Maoist Centre speaks with the media following the party's withdrawal of support for the UML in Kathmandu on Tuesday.



PMO

**FRENEMIES:** Prime Minister K P Oli on Wednesday met Nepali Congress leaders at the residence of Sher Bahadur Deuba to lobby for his confidence vote in Parliament on 10 May.



AMIT MACHAMASI

**GRIM TASK:** With capital's only electric crematorium unable to handle the growing number of Covid fatalities, officials arrange pyres for the dead on the banks of the Bagmati.



UK IN NEPAL/TWITTER

**LIFE SAVING:** The British Embassy installs an oxygen plant with the capacity to generate 160 large cylinders per day at the Police Hospital in Kathmandu on Wednesday.



ROSHAN SAPKOTA/RSS

**LOCAL HEROES:** Local cooperatives, the youth club and Red Cross in Patan's Chysal neighbourhood prepare a local isolation centre for coronavirus patients.

# Coping with anxiety in new lockdown

An increase in depression, anxiety and low moods could lead to another mental health pandemic

2020 was a blur and I was hoping 2021 would bring an end to the pandemic, so we could start moving on with our lives. But the surge in Covid-19 cases in India is causing a second wave in Nepal, too.



With millions losing their jobs and struggling to make ends meet in a country where many survive on daily wages, the concept of lockdown may seem helpful. However, the fear of death from hunger seems to pose a bigger threat than Covid.

I talk to my parents every day, and get updates on family members to see how everyone is doing and making it through the day. My father tells me daily how many people tested positive and how Nepal continues to struggle with finding enough hospital beds for those whose oxygen levels dropped suddenly.

One of his friends who had to be suddenly hospitalised, was discharged. "You never know, who will catch it next," he told me.

As I make a list of pros and cons of which vaccine I should get, I continue to hear about how my mother and aunt in Nepal have been trying to get vaccinated. Vaccines should be available for those who are above 60, but they cannot locate where to get it. Now, vaccinations have stopped because vaccine lines themselves became spreaders.

It is hard for me to be far away and try to offer support when we are physically apart. It is usually the same conversation with my parents every day, and while we try to stay hopeful that the vaccine will help, we wonder when things will get better.

My friends here constantly ask me how my parents are doing as they read about the emergency in India and Nepal, and all I can say is: "Yes, they are okay, but the country is not." I try to stay strong, while feeling completely helpless from halfway around the world.

Nepal banned all domestic and international flights this week, after going into mandated quarantine from 29 April. Nearly half the districts in Nepal are in lockdown for two weeks. Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur are the most affected by the pandemic with half the 7,448 new cases nationwide on Monday.

I had no doubt that by the time of my planned visit to Nepal in September, Covid would have been a distant memory. But with the way things are progressing, that glimmer of hope feels fainter and fainter.

When even rich countries continue to struggle with the pandemic despite all their resources, I worry how a developing country like Nepal will overcome this. What is the government of Nepal doing about vaccines? Will the second lockdown really help? What plans are in place to help people bearing the economic impact of the lockdown?

My father and mother say they try to stay positive and strong during this difficult time because there is nothing else they can do. We have grown so used to the lack of social interactions that the only way to stay connected has been limited to talking on the phone, or video chatting.

Last week, I had my first anxiety attack of the year after many people here in the United States asked me how my family was doing in Nepal. I felt helpless and overwhelmed with the concern and in telling others "everything is okay (for now)", when I knew clearly that I was not okay.

We are all exhausted from the never-ending stress. As I sat up in bed, holding myself, rocking back and forth telling myself to focus on my breathing and repeating, "I am okay, I am okay" I was not sure if I believed myself. I felt consumed by the overwhelming feeling of helplessness, guilt and regret.

We have seen many lose their lives, and it is the fear of how many more people we will lose again. What are we going to do when we do not know how to control the spread?

The only thing that I know that is under our control is our own emotions, and it is hard when lives of so many loved ones are at stake. Living in fear and anxiety of the worst that might happen makes it extremely hard for many to go on with their day-to-day lives.

There is social stigma attached to mental health, plus the lack of resources in Nepal has made this time more difficult for Nepalis. It is recommended you speak to a therapist, but many do not know about this and face difficulty finding one.

A daily habit of meditation is one technique we can use at home to practice mindfulness and strengthen our mental state. It is challenging to attempt meditation when the world around you is in chaos, but it seems to be the only thing that can help many right now when we need it the most.

Speaking to your loved ones and checking in on them regularly has proven to be extremely helpful, so I would recommend we continue staying connected with family members and friends whether we live in the same city or different continents.

Also, try keeping your minds busy by reading or watching television to reduce some stress. Adopting new hobbies or taking this time to learn something new will also keep your mind preoccupied because overthinking about the situation without a helpful solution will only bring you down more.

It is not easy to focus on our overall health when the country is in shambles, but taking care of our physical health is also very important during this time. Making sure to eat well and incorporating physical activity may seem minor, but will improve our sense of overall wellbeing. Some have found that getting a pet or raising plants in the garden can help with the low mood.

As I try to stay strong for myself and my family from across the world, I hope we take the time to stay connected with loved ones and prioritise our physical health. I hope the daily meditation, healthy diet and physical exercise can ease the stress of the second lockdown. This is a time for us to stay strong for ourselves and others, while we hope the dark clouds pass over us quickly.

*Anjana Rajbhandary lives and works in Chicago. She writes this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental health, physical health and socio-cultural issues.*



AMIT MACHAMASI





Nani pulls the elastic band tucked behind her ear and tugs off the mask from her face. It is pink. The mask. It is modelled after a surgical mask—the same flexile lining on one end with a bunch of pleats gathering at the centre, allowing the material to unfold over the face.



SUBURBAN TALES  
Pratibha Tuladhar

But it isn't a surgical mask. It is a copy. Nani squats by the public tap, reaches for the small piece of abandoned soap. The soap has degenerated from constantly lying by the tap and from being repeatedly grabbed by several pairs of hands. Now, Nani holds it too.

The soap suds as she rubs it on her mask. The froth leaves a creamy feel on Nani's palms, otherwise dry from all the washing and cleaning she does, day in and day out. Nani rinses the mask in running water, wrings it and then hangs it next to her *kurta* on the clothesline.

This is her daily ritual after she returns home from work. She washes the mask, first thing and leaves it to dry—it has to see her through another day.

Rita Didi, whose house Nani

visits every day to clean and wash, had told her: "Nani, here is the money for you to buy masks. Buy a box of surgical masks from the pharmacist's. Wear a new one every day when you come to work."

"Surgical," Rita Didi had repeated and had placed a five hundred rupee note in her palm. And as Nani closed her fist to hold the money in, in her mind she immediately saw note books and pencils and a new water bottle that little Reshma had been asking for. So, on her way back home, Nani stopped at the local store.

She spent two hundred rupees on a water bottle that had the image of a mouse with massive black ears, looking happy in a red frock with white dots. She spent another two hundred on a note book, pencils and a bunch of coloured chart papers.

That was when she had spotted the pink mask, staring at her from a bunch of green, grey, blue masks stacked against a pail of *daal*. So, fifteen rupees was spent on a pink mask and the change, she thrust into her bag.

Nani had finally acquired a mask! She unfurled the pleats of the mask like she were opening an umbrella before an impending storm and pressed it against her face, sliding the elastic bands behind her ears. She had felt safe.

A week since, the little pink thing hung on the clothesline,



PHOTO: PRATIBHA TULADHAR

# The economics of masks

Masks are here to stay, but how can they be made more accessible to all?

frayed from daily washing. Thin sprays of material like the remnants of a broken spider's web formed a bush over the front of the mask—the part that chaffed her nose.

Tomorrow, Rita Didi would once again ask her why she wasn't wearing a surgical mask. Again, Nani would tell her that she had not spotted an open pharmacy yet. And Rita Didi would go into a rant about safety, all of it shouted through her white mask that looked like the snout of some animal.

Rita Didi would say, "I'm only asking you to come to work because I know you need a salary. I'm trying to help you through this difficult time." And Nani would nod and begin to do the math in her head, breaking her salary of seven thousand rupees into house rent, a bag of rice, Reshma's school fees, a new pair of *chappals*, medicines for Ama, and an umbrella and, and...

...

S walks up to an elderly man who's pushing a bicycle, loaded down with big baskets carrying

fruits.

"Dai," she interrupts him, as he turns around and smiles at her. "*Tapai le mask kina nalagauna bhako?*" Why aren't you wearing a mask?

The man laughs and pulls out a blue, crushed surgical mask from his front pocket and spreads it over his face. He explains that he had been sucking on some tobacco a while ago and had removed the mask so he could spit and that he had forgotten to wear it back on.

S requests him to keep it on at all times and he laughs and says *Huss, Huss*.

"See?" S turns to me. "We keep berating people for not wearing masks, but we aren't thinking of why they aren't wearing them." And as though to prove her point, a man walks past us, briefly stopping to spit a streak of *paan* into the gutter. His mask is dangling by his ear.

"We need to think of individual needs, cultures and all kinds of things when talking about masks. It's no use blaming people without

trying to understand why. We need to set up mask banks across the country, so that people have access to masks!" S says excitedly.

Past the narrow alleyway, we enter a store that sells branded clothing. There are sets of colourful cloth masks arranged in rows on the shelf. The masks have double layers—made from soft cotton that comes with the promise of not leaving marks on the ridge of your nose. They come with the promise of sitting snugly against your face. They come with the promise of colours that match your outfit.

"I switched to cloth masks because I don't want to be throwing surgical masks out everyday and add to the waste," explains A. "Do they work?" we ask the guy at the counter. "Yes, yes," he averts our eyes, quickly shoves the masks into tony pouches and pushes them at us across the counter. 🇳🇵

*Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people (with some names changed) in the author's life.*

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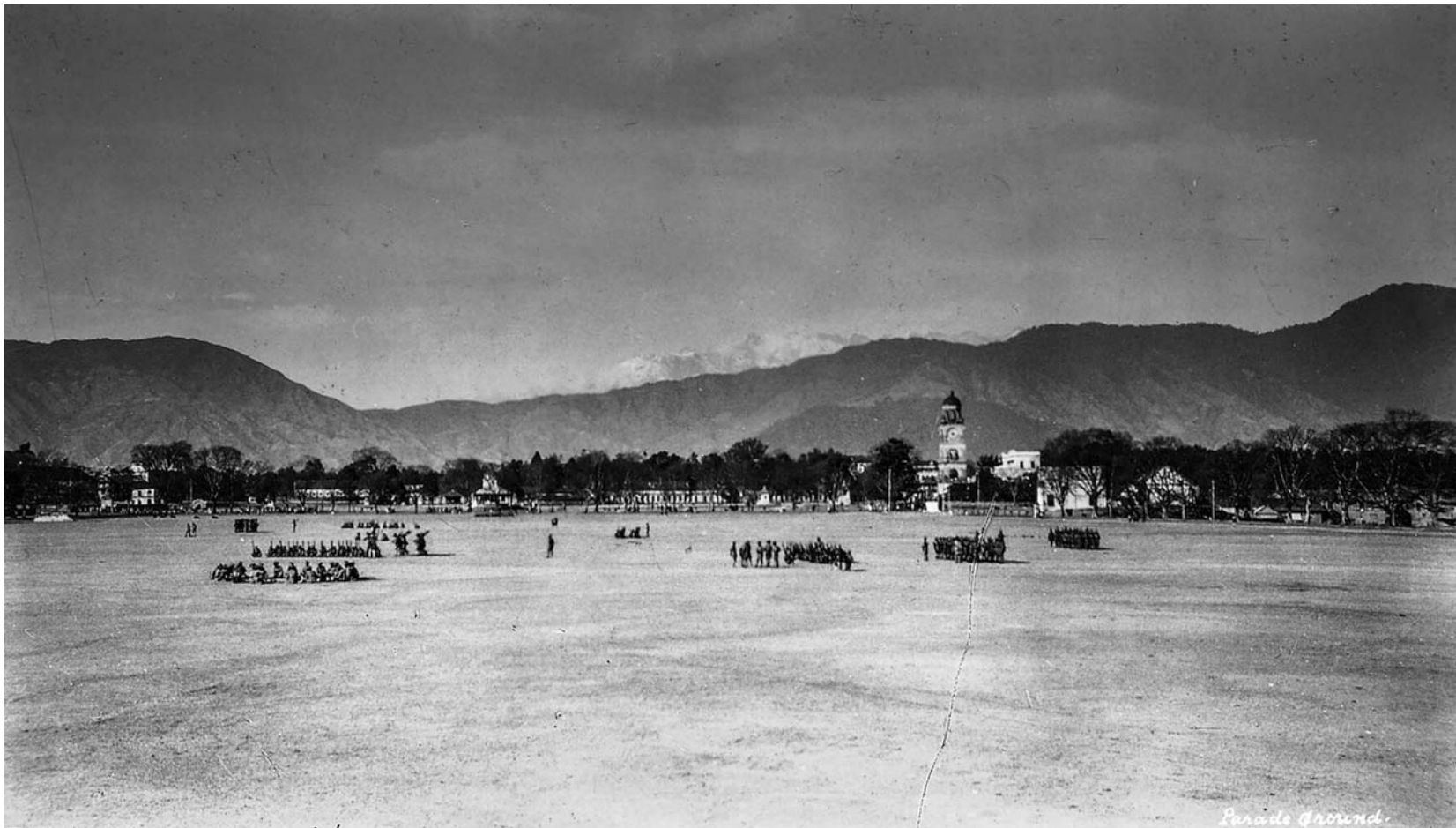
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Tundikhel in 1921.

PHOTO: MADAN PURASKAR PUSTAKALAYA ARCHIVE



Tundikhel once again became a camp site after the 2015 earthquake.



Narayan Chaur packed with people after 2015 earthquake

# Kathmandu loses its open spaces

This will mean more injuries and deaths in the next big earthquake

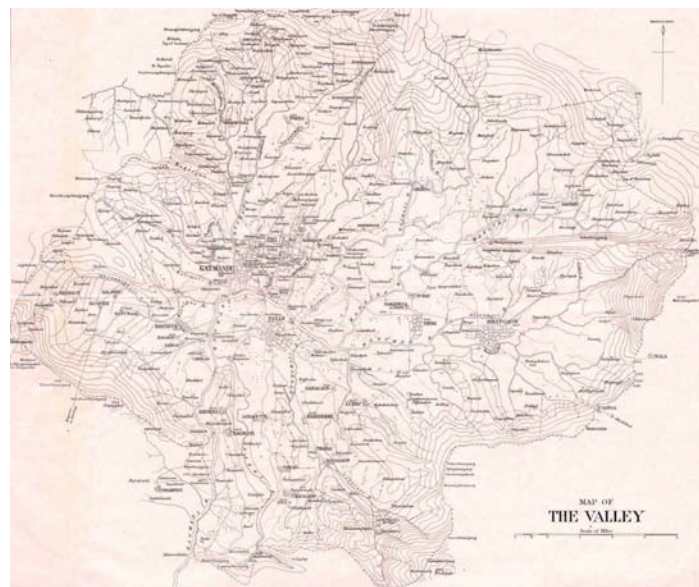
● **Tom Robertson and Nilima Thapa Shrestha**

The tragic death tolls from two recent earthquakes in the Greater Himalaya should give Kathmandu residents pause. Kashmir, 2005: more than 73,000. Sichuan, 2008: over 88,000.

In urban earthquake emergencies, few things are more critical than open space, but Kathmandu Valley has more people and less usable open space than ever before.

A 2020 International Organisation for Migration (IOM) report warns that many of Kathmandu's crucial disaster evacuation spaces have been 'reduced, encroached, transformed into non-usable areas or heavily built up', and says the Valley will suffer 'extreme difficulties' in the next big earthquake.

'Open spaces have not been recognised as vital city infrastructures that can be of great significance during a disaster,' the IOM report says. History has actually shown the importance of Kathmandu's open space time and again.



Map of Kathmandu Valley in the book Nepal by Perceval Landon.



Tundikhel used for shelter and relief after the 1934 earthquake, in which the Dharara broke in two.



Hanuman Dhoka Square after the 1934 earthquake.

1934

In the afternoon of 15 January 1934, a 8.1 magnitude earthquake shook Nepal and north India. The British surgeon Lt-Col C H Smith described that day's devastation:

'The city itself was a dreadful sight. At least one house in five had completely collapsed and very few seemed to have escaped uninjured...every hundred yards or so the narrow streets were blocked with piles of debris twenty feet high over which we had to climb.'

Residents, he noted, fled to Kathmandu's open spaces:

'The inhabitants were behaving splendidly; there seemed to be no panic. The people were all hurrying out of the narrow streets towards the various open squares with what goods and cattle they had been able to save, and were settling down in family groups in these open spaces preparing to pass the night as best they could.'

The next day Smith found people 'all collected in the various squares and open spaces. They were quiet and orderly, sitting in

family groups cooking what food they had. They had no shelter, and must have spent a very unpleasant night, as there was a heavy ground frost.' Kathmandu was lucky in one respect, Smith said. Had the earthquake hit at night or early morning, when people are generally indoors, collapsing buildings would have taken many more lives.

Traditionally, Kathmandu residents use many types of open spaces: streets, courtyards (*bahal/bahil*), neighbourhood squares (*nani/chuka*), palace squares, and open space at town periphery (*khyo*, buffer zone).

These communal open spaces were used as living rooms and work spaces (not for motorcycle parking). The people dried grain, washed clothes, and looked after children at play. But during disasters, they turned to these spaces for safety and shelter. Open space created resilience.

At the time, Kathmandu Valley had a tenth of today's population. People had no problem finding open places to run to.

The city's massive growth was decades in the future. Rani Pokhari, British journalist Perceval Landon noted in the 1920s, stood outside

the city. The Ashoka Stupa loomed 'a mile outside the city of Patan in the country'. Boudha sat 'among the maize fields'. Budhanilkantha was a 'long journey out'. Times have changed.

In 1930, approximately 250,000 people lived in Kathmandu Valley. Today there are nearly 4,000,000 people. After almost a century of hurried, haphazard, rule-flaunting development, life-saving open spaces have been ignored and are now much harder to find.

The IOM report reminds us: 'Open spaces are taken for granted until the need arrives.'





People using median of Arniko Highway at Min Bhawan in 2015.



People taking shelter at a pati in Asan Tole after the April 2015 earthquake.



2015

During the April 2015 Gorkha Earthquake, Valley residents once again turned to the city's open spaces. Thousands of families moved into large open spaces such as the Tundikhel. The parade ground also served as a debris management site.

Similarly, Narayan Chaur became a temporary home for 7,000 people. Five days after the first big quake, 33 open spaces provided refuge to almost 31,000 residents

of Kathmandu from 5,500 households.

City planners and local activists deserve applause for Narayan Chaur. One of the 83 emergency evacuation sites identified in 2013, it was developed to be multipurpose: as a green public park, a playground for children, and as an emergency shelter in disasters. It pioneered the use of Community Level Search and Rescue (CLSAR) Boxes, containing hammers, rope, saw and many more rescue materials.

Open spaces like Tundikhel and Narayan Chaur brought neighbouring families together, saving lives and reviving community bonds. Kathmandu residents also relied upon open spaces as small as highway medians. After an earthquake, all open space counts.

In 2013, government planners identified 83 open spaces for evacuation and refuge during disasters. According to the 2020 IOM report, only about half of

these sites are actually usable in an emergency. New small buildings, storage areas, and infrastructure expansion have eaten into important space. Ten sites have been dropped from the list as they now serve other purposes.

The report highlights other problems: an almost total lack of on-site water and sanitation facilities, unsuitable terrain, scarce local participation, especially of marginalised groups; low public awareness; and insufficient routine emergency drills. Some local governments did not even realise that spaces under their jurisdiction are designated earthquake evacuation sites.

We also need to plan for multiple hazards: earthquake and floods at the same time, or even simultaneous earthquake, flood, and pandemic. Nepal ranks eleventh and thirtieth worldwide in earthquake and flood vulnerability.

This multiple hazard preparedness scenario is not impossible. After the 2015 earthquake, people in Bhaktapur's

shelter camps had to flee the gushing Hanumante River.

We often call earthquakes 'natural' disasters. Doing so allows governments and others to avoid blame. But the real cause of many disasters is not nature, it is poor human planning. Kathmandu Valley residents would do well to remember how they have relied on open space in the past and will need it again in the future.

The World Health Organisation recommends 9 sq m of open space per person. Kathmandu has about 0.25 sq m per person. Lalitpur has only 0.06 sq m per person, with poorer people's access even less. So, neighbourhoods with the least open spaces have to be prioritised. Regular drills are needed everywhere so people know where to go and what to do in a crisis.

Says Anil Pokhrel of the National Risk Reduction and Management Authority, "Nepal is one of the fastest urbanising countries in the world, and 2015 was an eye opener. Government

had done some work, but it really showed us the meaning of open space."

He stresses the importance of gardens and parking areas, not just the 83 designated open spaces in the Valley. "We need spaces closer to home," he adds. "We have serious threats to urban space, such as construction and encroachments, but we also have communities like Thimi that are protecting and restoring ponds and cultural heritage as open spaces for emergencies."

Pokhrel says the aftermath of the earthquake six years ago showed how crucial water and toilets are for families. He adds, "Our message to every local government is this: work disaster planning into everything you do." 🇳🇵

**Nilima Thapa Shrestha** is an architect working on urban ecological planning and Disaster Risk Reduction.

**Tom Robertson**, PhD, is an environmental historian who writes about Kathmandu and Nepali history.

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# Lockdown downtime

As a Backside columnist, it falls upon this scribe's lap to urge readers to look at the bright side, stay bullish, be a beacon of hope, and believe that without dark clouds there is no possibility of having a silver lining.

Thanks to this unhealthy emergency, we can finally stop worrying about all the corruption, political incompetence, instability, selfishness, greed, wildfires, air pollution, Nepal's widening trade gap, and the state of disrepair on the Godavari Road. There are now much more serious things to worry about.

My fellow-communist columnists are all complaining that the grumblement did this and did that, but did nothing to control the Covid pandemonium. That is unkind. Given the kind of blunders Nepal's rulers are prone to making, it is good that they have learnt from their mistakes, and have taken a vow of silence and not lifted a finger against the virus. Imagine if they were left to their own devices to make more asinine rules and award more contracts for PCR and vaccine imports to try to fight the virus. There would be chaos.

The problem with this country is not that we have a government that does nothing, the problem is that opinion-makers want it to do something, anything. Which is why it is good that Prime Minister Ali is not listening to them. If the grovelment is going to make bold decisions like banning all outbound flights except to the one neighbouring country beginning with the letter 'T' that is going through the world's worst Covid crisis, it is better it does nothing.

Historically, the time-tested method of Nepal's leaders when faced with a crisis is to play dead, and not make any hasty decisions until it is too late. The idea is to ignore the problem, pretend it does not exist — that way there is no urgent necessity to actually do anything. GONE has to learn to live up to its acronym.

Nevertheless, given the seriousness of the pandemic, Nepal's leaders are setting a good example by promoting hand-washing. This is working brilliantly because they have washed their hands off dealing with the pandemic.

Nepal also takes self-isolation very seriously. The best thing we have done is to be asked to be left alone by the international community in this crisis, and that is why we have not lobbied to be on the list of countries that the US is shipping AZ vaccines to, spurned Sputnik, played hard-to-get with the Chinese, and we did not take part in Joe Biden's Climate Summit for fear that we would actually have to show something we have done to save the planet. All this means that we have cleverly kept Indian, Chinese and Russian jabs at arm's length.

Now that we have Lockdown downtime each of us has to look at all the things we have to get used to during this incarceration:

1. Gentlemen can grow that hip pony-tail that they always wanted to have. The Ass already has a tail, so this does not apply to me.
2. Stop shaving, save on expensive razor refills and foam.
3. No need for deodorants, your armpits can be as smelly as you want.
4. Some ladies have adopted a retro 1970s look by hanging around the house bra-less.
5. Gentlemen can attend zoom meetings in shirt, tie and undies.
6. Wear masks at all times since you don't have to smile and put on a brave face.
7. When flights resume, Kathmandu Airport will replace frisking arriving passengers with antibody searches so as to stop the virus before it enters Nepali air space.



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